

CORRECTED VERSION

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Subcommittee

Inquiry into Environment Protection Amendment (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2011

Melbourne, 17 November 2011

Members

Ms S. Pennicuik
Mrs I. Peulich

Mr J. Scheffer
Mr L. Tarlamis

Chair: Mrs I. Peulich

Staff

Secretary: Mr K. Delaney

Witness

Cr S. Dunn, Yarra Ranges Shire Council.

The CHAIR — I welcome Cr Samantha Dunn. You will have to clarify to us exactly which hat you are wearing today — whether it is the Yarra Ranges Shire Council hat or your VLGA hat. I presume it is the council. Welcome to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Legislation Committee's hearing in relation to the inquiry into the Environment Protection Amendment (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2011. In a moment I will ask you to state your name and contact address and the name of the organisation you are representing.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975. It is also subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore you are protected against anything you might say here, but as soon as you get to the doorstep that parliamentary privilege no longer applies. All evidence is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript in three or so days, and you will have an opportunity to correct any typographical errors but not to amend anything of substance in terms of your submission. When you will return it to us we will upload it to our website in due course, with the approval of the committee, and it will become a part of the evidence when the report is tabled.

We have allowed some time for you to make your PowerPoint presentation, and I welcome that. I love PowerPoint presentations. The rest of the time will be available for questions by members. I ask you to begin by stating your name, your business mailing address and also the organisation you are representing today.

Overheads shown.

Cr DUNN — My name is Cr Samantha Dunn. My address is PO Box 105, Lilydale, 3140, and today I am representing the Yarra Ranges Shire Council — so I well and truly have that hat on. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this; it is something that the Yarra Ranges council feels very strongly about. I thought I would start with just a little bit of context setting in terms of the Shire of Yarra Ranges. We are located in the outer east of Melbourne; in fact if you gazed that way and saw the hills, you would see one of the ends of the Yarra Ranges. We are a shire of 2500 square kilometres, a population of 150 000 people and a budget of \$150 million per annum.

The CHAIR — And growing?

Cr DUNN — Growing in a very limited fashion. It is a slow place to grow because there are very few development opportunities in Yarra Ranges; there are more in our urban areas. One thing about Yarra Ranges is that we have 55 townships spread throughout our shire, and that goes from the very urban centres right through to very distinct rural and remote communities. In terms of our budget, we spend \$11 million a year on waste, so it is something that really matters to our council. One of the standout things about Yarra Ranges is that we regard ourselves as Melbourne's playground, because we have the beautiful Yarra Valley and the beautiful Dandenong Ranges as well. But more than that function alone, with a visitation of 2.5 million tourists a year we have significant natural assets in terms of the Yarra Ranges National Park and the Dandenong Ranges National Park, along with 51 per cent of Melbourne's water catchments, so we think we have a very significant role to play in terms of Melbourne and securing its water supply. That is just a bit of context of the shire.

Our community is very passionate about the environment, as you would expect in a location like that. We have a community plan called Vision 2020. It is where we check in with our community to see what they think about various things. One thing that is very strong in that community plan is environmental stewardship, and a key component of that is that our community has embraced a zero-waste society. It is something that our community wants to see happen as part of living in the region. In terms of Yarra Ranges, we have had long-held support for container deposit legislation. We first resolved to support this sort of legislation back in 2008. More recently in April we resolved to write to this state government and to the current federal government to reiterate our support for container deposit legislation because of the benefits we see for our municipality.

We think there are really significant opportunities for our council, and the first part I will talk about is the reduction we would have in litter on our streets, in our pits, in our gross pollutant trap cleaning and in our street and public park public bins as well. At the moment in terms of the mix of waste in our public bins, 27 per cent of that waste is beverage containers, and we think this particular legislation would have a real benefit in terms of diverting that out. It would not even get into the bin in the first place; we suspect it will not end up there.

Mr SCHEFFER — What is the other 70 per cent?

Cr DUNN — Seventeen per cent is other recyclables, and 56 per cent is other garbage generally. We do not have a specific crew assigned to general litter collection, but we estimate that beverage containers account for about 15 per cent of the litter collected in our 27 gross pollutant traps. That equates to 44 tonnes of beverage containers in any one year.

We also note that in high public usage areas — whether that is a public transport hub or major community facility — there is a lot of accumulation of beverage containers. Just to put that into context, we have a local skate park which has incredibly high usage and very popular. We recover 2 cubic metres of beverage containers that are unfortunately posted down the pits. That is not for a lack of bins around the place; it just seems that that is a fun thing to do. We suspect that if there was a quid in it, that might not happen with those beverage containers. They might be put to better use than being posted down our pits.

In terms of kerbside recycling, we think there are some wins for council there because of the increased value of what is in the kerbside recycling. We believe that households will continue to use their recycle bins to dispose of their beverage containers. We do not see that there will be a loss away from that, so that actually creates real benefits for council, because now there are some revenues attached to that — more than just the actual materials to sell themselves. We certainly think there should be a mandatory approach to this; we think that is something that has been lacking in the past — that it is not mandatory — and we also think there are real opportunities to operate depots out of the three waste stations that we have in the shire.

In terms of opportunities for the community, we think this is an area where there will be some real benefits for the community. We are very lucky we have a very high volunteerism rate, and a lot of those volunteers are involved with enhancing the environment. There are also lots of young people's groups — scouts, guides and youth and service organisations. We think this would be a great way for them to make income. At the moment I have to say that these groups are fantastic at getting out there and getting rid of a lot of rubbish, but I think it would be a great incentive to those groups to have money attached to that. They do it because they love their community and they love their area, but it would be a real windfall for them if there was a container deposit attached to those beverage containers they pick up.

The reality is that I have been out on the Clean Up Australia Day events as much as I am sure the rest of you have, and there is a significant amount of beverage containers that we pick up as part of that. In fact they actually make up the most amount of rubbish that we collect on those particular days. It is an anecdotal observation, but it is one that I am constantly reminded of every year when I go out on those events.

Another area where we think there will be benefits is in hospitality events and festivals, where we are really not getting the rates of recycling that we should be getting. I know that a lot in the hospitality industry are diverting their recyclables straight into landfill; they are not actually being recycled even through a recycle service. Also I think there is a great potential and incentive for those industries to actually start to recycle their containers. This was really reinforced to us when council initially looked at and considered a report around container deposit legislation. When we looked at the recycling rates for South Australia versus the recycling rates for Victoria we found that a really compelling argument in terms of their rates being so much higher than Victoria is that they capture so much more of that beverage stream.

We also think there is potential for individuals in relation to container deposit legislation, particularly for those on very low incomes — those who are homeless and younger people. We have seen experiences in other countries where people will actually use festivals as a way to gather a whole lot of recyclable containers and actually generate some income for themselves from that.

The environment is the other key one for us. Our landscapes are really important — they are our stock in trade in Yarra Ranges, and we spend a lot of time protecting those landscapes for a whole range of reasons. It is not just about visual amenity; it is actually around the impact on the environment itself, particularly our waterways. We see a lot of litter in our creeks and streams and parks and gardens, and I think this scheme would stop or divert a lot of that waste going into the environment. We also believe that if that material is diverted from landfill, another broader impact will be the less need for raw materials to create new beverage containers, reducing emissions and water consumption with that.

In summary, as a council we believe the bill will support that effective life cycle of container products. It is really cradle to grave but back to cradle again as it is recycled through. It certainly supports the policies of

council and the initiatives and the community aspiration of Yarra Ranges. I might leave it at that so you have some time for questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Cr Dunn. We might kick off with Ms Pennicuik.

Ms PENNICUIK — Your council is obviously supporting a CD scheme and seeing it as complementary to kerbside recycling, but we have heard other councils maintain that it would duplicate or compete with kerbside recycling. Could you make a comment about why you think it is complementary whereas other councils seem to see it as competing with, duplicating or undermining kerbside recycling?

Cr DUNN — I think the reality is that a lot of households in Yarra Ranges would simply put their beverage containers in their recycle bin, like they do now. I think, in terms of the incentive, it is not enough for them to change their behaviour in relation to that because they are recycling. So there is a commitment. They think they are recycling — they are recycling. For council it is a windfall gain because those products now have a price on them. We do not see that waste being diverted at all out of our recycling service. I think if you probably have a household full of some really keen kids, you might, or the local scout group might target you, but I think on the whole our community will continue to use their recycle bins. I just do not see the behaviour change diverting to that extent.

Ms PENNICUIK — So you do not see it — —

Cr DUNN — We do not see it as a threat.

The CHAIR — I presume that the council's support of this position is reflected by some motion or policies that are on the books. Have we been provided with that?

Cr DUNN — That is correct. We have provided the detail of that. We are more than happy to provide the committee with the detail of that. A report came out to council where we considered it.

The CHAIR — Is that a longstanding position?

Cr DUNN — It was originally considered by council in 2008.

The CHAIR — There is \$11 million spent on waste by your council. Can you unpack that a little bit, to use a pun? How is that spent?

Cr DUNN — It is generally on waste collection more than anything, and the fair brunt of that will be in residential collection, hard waste and bundled green waste. There is also a component of that which is for dumped rubbish as well — that is a significant concern in our area — and supporting community initiatives like clean-up days and those sorts of things.

The CHAIR — In terms of dumped rubbish, what is emerging as the articles that are being dumped more commonly?

Cr DUNN — It seems the rubbish of the day at the moment is mattresses. There are a lot of mattresses.

The CHAIR — Do you have a view as to why that might be the case? It is certainly what is happening throughout metropolitan Melbourne. Do you have a view as to why that might be the case?

Cr DUNN — Our view, and this is completely anecdotal, is that it is because of the cost to actually take those items to landfill — and we do in fact find them on those road corridors that actually go to our transfer sites.

The CHAIR — As is the case in my municipality. In my electorate it happens more often around catchment areas of educational institutions that cater for either international students or rural and regional students — that sort of turnover of tenancy. Is that a factor, perhaps, in the proliferation of mattresses in your council?

Cr DUNN — No. Because we do not really have that type of facility there, that is probably not going to be an indicator for us.

The CHAIR — In terms of the types of containers that you have, what was interesting was that we had a presentation, and I cannot recall exactly who it was. It was a PowerPoint, and it was on collecting rubbish or collecting containers. What was evident was that the vast majority were water. Is there any sort of analysis as to the types of containers that are largely being — —

Cr DUNN — We do not have an analysis of those, but in my experience, which is quite focused on the Dandenong Ranges because that is my patch, there would be more aluminium containers that we find. Generally soft drinks or pre-mixed alcoholic beverages are probably the most common of the lot. Soft drinks would have to be the absolute; you would not have to drive for more than 1 minute to find soft drink containers on the side of the road.

The CHAIR — I understand there is a proliferation of them, but what astonished me was the volume of water bottles that actually comprised that pick-up.

Cr DUNN — We might have to do an audit at the next clean-up day.

Mr SCHEFFER — Thanks for your presentation. I want to come back to what Ms Pennicuik was raising about the different evidence we are getting, some seeing it as being complementary to what councils and shires are doing and others seeing it as undermining or duplicating what is already happening out their way. I got your message loud and clear, but what I just want to ask you what you are doing at Yarra Ranges in relation to the total zero-waste strategy that is operating statewide.

What we have there operating under that strategy is that there are really clear targets, there is benchmarking and there is good monitoring of how it happens. We are starting to get the data on how there are improvements in every area in littering, in solid waste collection and in recovery, and the only area that is not going so well is the reduction in the production of waste at the front end of it. That is a pretty impressive structure being put in place, and now we have a proposal through Ms Hartland's bill that kind of hives out one relatively small component of items in the waste cycle and wants to have a whole infrastructure developed to deal with that problem. So what I am asking you is: could you talk to us about how Yarra Ranges links in to the total zero-waste strategy that is being run statewide against that benchmarking and all those ways you are working?

Cr DUNN — Sure. Yarra Ranges council is a reflection of our community in that it is very important to us. We see that one of our key roles in relation to that is around education and advocacy. We dedicate significant resources to providing information around sustainable living, lightening your footprint — consumption is part of that — respecting environmental values and reinforcing all of those things that our community knows are important with ways of how they can help in the broader term. A lot of it is around understanding your footprint generally.

We pitch that at a number of different levels. We are really keen pitching that at the schools level through our Learning for Sustainability program, because in terms of bang for your buck, if you like, we think it is very good to try to educate young people who will carry those skills through our community for a lifetime.

The CHAIR — And their parents.

Cr DUNN — Yes. Never underestimate the power of pester power either in all of that.

Mr SCHEFFER — I appreciate the community development and changing people's attitudes. I do not have any problem with any of that. I guess what I am asking for some more evidence on is, in nuts and bolts terms, in an area as geographically complex as the Yarra Ranges, where curbside collection is not as easy in somewhere like downtown Carlton, how does it work? How do you benchmark your success? How does it relate to the total zero-waste strategy?

Cr DUNN — We look at what ends up in our recycling bins. We look at how much of that is contaminated and what we need to do to try to stop that contamination. It is still a real concern in terms of contaminating the entire truckload of recyclables because someone has put the wrong thing in the wrong bin. In terms of benchmarking against those state indicators, I would really have to get back to the committee with some more information.

Mr SCHEFFER — Thanks. The last thing relates to your submission and to data. One of the councils we talked to before talked about the dearth of data and how they basically need to hold fire on a final decision. They have some misgivings and they need to hold fire until they get in some more independent data, which they say does not exist. Yet in your submission you say:

Yarra Ranges council undertook and formally considered its own brief research ...

And then you say a few things about that. It is a really complex area. Has Yarra Ranges council got a proper data system that it is operating from and a proper research base?

Cr DUNN — We do audits, so we draw a lot of our data from those audits.

Mr SCHEFFER — But, by your own words, your support for CDL is drawn from your own 'brief research'. From what I read in the rest of the submission, everything flows from that base. My question is: does that base have integrity for you to develop a policy on?

Cr DUNN — Absolutely. Council would not make a decision based on some spurious data thrown together. We would make that decision based on what we believe to be rigorous data.

The CHAIR — Is that research or is it actually just a report of the incidence from your collection system?

Cr DUNN — It is going back to 2008, so I think it is — —

Mr SCHEFFER — You say both. You say 'brief research' and then you call it a report a bit later on, so I am not clear what it is.

Cr DUNN — I think what it is really is the report that came to council, which included research within it, in order for council to make its decision.

The CHAIR — Is that something that is generally available?

Cr DUNN — Absolutely.

The CHAIR — Could you forward a copy of that to us?

Cr DUNN — I would be happy to.

The CHAIR — I have one question. Are you able to provide a reference for the statistic given in your submission that 9 billion out of 11 billion containers used each year are going to landfill?

Cr DUNN — I can, but I cannot right now. I will forward it to you.

The CHAIR — Okay, you can forward that to our committee executive.

Ms PENNICUIK — The last page of the submission provided by Mr Harper says:

A broadbased packaging and recovery scheme would reduce unsightly and dangerous litter in our environment whilst at the same time increasing recycling ...

That seems to imply that your council is looking beyond beverage containers to more broadbased packaging and recovery. Is there anything you could tell us about that, or is that a work in progress?

Cr DUNN — Our council wholeheartedly supports the national packaging covenant. One of the weaknesses we see with that is that it is not mandatory. Container deposit is a part of that whole package. Ideally we would love to see that mandatory cradle to grave back to cradle across all packaging, but it is one container at a time. We certainly support those sorts of ambitions.

The CHAIR — Is there any reason why you do not have an officer with you today?

Cr DUNN — My officer, who is our manager of waste, is on holidays today.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your submission. As outlined earlier, you will get a copy of the transcript and the opportunity to make any corrections of a typographical nature. You can return that to the executive officer of our committee, and it will in due course be uploaded to our website and become part of the report. Thank you so much for your time.

Cr DUNN — Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.

